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Harrison Ownbey
Texas Tech University

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Review of *The Global M&A Tango: How to Reconcile Cultural Differences in Mergers, Acquisitions, and Strategic Partnerships*. Fons Trompenaars and Maarten Nijhoff Asser. New York: McGraw Hill, 2011

Harrison Ownbey

Texas Tech University, USA

The cultural clashes and communication failures that often occur during international business mergers and acquisitions (M&As) revolve around rhetoric. However, many business experts facilitating M&As neglect rhetorical issues, which then exponentially compounds other problems. A large majority of mergers and acquisitions fail primarily because of cultural differences. Dutch authors Fons Trompenaars and Maarten Nijhoff Asser offer *The Global M&A Tango* as a baseline method for realizing new strengths and delivering business benefits by connecting different viewpoints. The book aims to enable M&A executives to create a dialogic foundation for new communication frameworks. It suggests several key processes to help frame cultural dilemmas, but under-emphasizes the fundamental roles of continuous articulation and rhetorical experts in these processes.

Trompenaars is best known for proposing seven different dimensions of culture in *Riding the Waves of Culture*, which he co-authored with Charles Hampden-Turner. In this widely cited text, the authors used hypothetical-situation surveys to build seven polar cultural measurement scales (individualism vs. communitarianism, universalism vs. particularism, etc.). While not an all-inclusive cultural profiling method, the seven dimensions helped conceptualize cultural issues as they pertained to business. The book drew criticism, however, for being too dichotomous.

In *The Global M&A Tango*, Trompenaars and Asser take precautions to be less absolute, and they admit that Trompenaars' previous research has limitations. The advice Trompenaars and Asser offer depends heavily on context; therefore some of the recommendations in the book (e.g., imagine the future, make key decisions, etc.) seem too vague to be actionable. Still, the book demonstrates a powerful niche for scholars of communication and rhetoric. Mergers provide a rhetorical perfect storm for communication theories to inform praxis and lead to tangible business gains.

The book is divided into three parts, but it concentrates on providing questions to enable communication to work toward a common goal. Part one stresses the importance of framing the dilemma by defining the companies: What are each company's vision, mission, purpose, strategy, and key value(s)? These questions assist companies in learning about their own internal culture;

self-awareness must precede intercultural awareness. For a successful M&A, each corporation must remain itself *and* synergize into a different whole. This synergy necessitates a high understanding of one's own value orientations and cultural biases, which makes scholars of rhetoric and communication ideally suited to frame M&As as dilemmas. Dilemmas are more complex than problems, and require new frameworks instead of linear solutions. Trompenaars and Asser underscore four key steps to create new frameworks for approaching cultural integration dilemmas in an M&A:

1. Recognition—companies must recognize each other's cultural differences;
2. Respect—companies must respect each other's processes as legitimate and treat them fairly;
3. Reconciliation—through recognition and respect, companies create a new framework where the best of both companies' processes occur;
4. Realization and rooting—the new company realizes practical implementations of reconciliation and rewards behaviors that embody respect and reconciliation as they relate to the new business.

Trompenaars and Asser maintain that if M&A key players execute the four R's under a mutually agreed upon goal, the merger will likely succeed. The authors provide examples of successful mergers that used the Trompenaars Hampden-Turner (THT) consultancy. These examples provide excellent case-by-case, grassroots, cultural analyses, allowing readers to examine M&A communication in specific contexts that dictate specific actions. Studying M&As on a case-by-case basis can help cultural scholars avoid generalities and stereotypes by working from the ground up. In that respect, the examples in the book are excellent. Unfortunately, the examples often tout THT's slick, internal research methods without discussing specifically how to process the data these methods generate. Even more unfortunately, the examples end when THT's consulting work ends, although this is far from when the communication processes end.

One may be shortsighted to assume that communication dilemmas are resolved when a corporation reaches the "realization & rooting" stage; yet, *The Global M&A Tango* implies they mostly are. For instance, Trompenaars and Asser neglect to discuss how to root these communication processes into an organization's memory. Each company's individual mission and goals, hopes for the merger, and corporate frameworks need to be compared, documented, and archived, along with the M&A's processes, meetings, complaints, and communications. This documentation requires a communication and rhetoric expert to understand which information, amidst an information abundance, is relevant to repeating and refining the communication process later. Trompenaars and Asser understate the constant (re)construction that cultural understanding requires to maintain quality and consistency, especially in large organizations with turnover.

Trust stems largely from consistency, which the M&A process can damage. To ensure consistency, the authors propose three questions for the company's continual re-evaluation and monitoring: what connects us, what separates us, and how we benefit from the connections and manage the differences. The book concludes by reminding readers to frame cultural issues as dilemmas, and that building a proper M&A communication framework requires a sense of urgency, leadership, and commitment. Readers must then decide for themselves how to

practically implement this broad advice, and this might prove challenging for someone not trained in rhetoric. For example, how does one create a sense of urgency among two cultures that may have different conceptions of urgency? How does one reward behaviors that exemplify recognition and respect if two cultures have different ideas of rewards?

The deliverables in this book are as contextually seated as the questions proposed to produce them, but the authors devote only a small amount of text to praxis. It's admirable for two business authors to admit that dilemmas cannot be reconciled with a prescriptive set of steps, but rhetoricians must pick up where this text leaves off. Because cultural clashes between different sections of large, global companies are not one-time issues, executives need full-time, skilled communication enablers. Unfortunately, this text fails to make this point eloquently. The authors relegate "continuous re-evaluation: monitoring change" to a disappointing half-page. As companies mature, they need visionary rhetoricians and technical communicators to iteratively define and articulate dilemmas. *The Global M&A Tango* conceptualizes the beginnings of mutual respect and dialogic communication between corporate cultures, but doesn't adequately detail the cyclic maintenance of these communications. Nevertheless, the book stresses the open-ended nature of cultural communication problems, and provides perceptive key questions for managers to initiate healthy cross-cultural communication frameworks.

Reference

Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (1998). *Riding the waves of culture*. (2nd ed., pp. 1–274). New York: McGraw-Hill.